

Linking the Arts to Student Achievement

A growing body of studies presents compelling evidence connecting student learning in the arts to a wide spectrum of academic and social benefits. Research has shown that what students learn in the arts may help them master other subjects, such as reading, math, or social studies. Students who participate in arts learning experiences often improve their achievement in other realms of learning and life.

Study of the arts has benefits in six major areas:

- * Reading and language skills
- * Mathematics skills
- * Thinking skills
- * Social skills
- * Motivation to learn
- * Positive school environment

One way to summarize how study of the arts affects student achievement is to say that learning in the arts is academic, basic, and comprehensive. It's as simple as A-B-C:

Learning in the arts is academic. Learning experiences in the arts contribute to the development of academic skills, including in the areas of reading and language development, and mathematics. Certain forms of arts instruction enhance and complement basic reading skills, language development, and writing skills. Certain types of music instruction help develop the capacity for spatial-temporal reasoning, which is the ability to understand the relationship of ideas and objects in space and time.

Learning in the arts is basic. Arts learning experiences contribute to the development of certain thinking, social, and motivational skills that are considered basic for success in school, work, and life. Reasoning ability, intuition, perception, imagination, inventiveness, creativity, problem-solving skills, and expression are among the thought processes associated with study of the arts. The arts also nurture a motivation to learn, and certain arts activities promote growth in self-confidence, self-control, conflict resolution, collaboration, empathy, and social tolerance.

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Learning in the arts is comprehensive. Integration of the arts as a critical component of the school curriculum affords students a complete and well-rounded education. The benefits associated with study of the arts are inclusive of all students. And an arts-rich learning environment can have far-reaching effects that extend to the entire school and surrounding community.

The evidence is clear: Study of the arts contributes to student achievement and success. Its multiple benefits are academic, basic, and comprehensive. Despite convincing research and strong public support, however, the arts remain on the margins of education, often the last to be added and the first to be dropped in times of strained budgets and shifting priorities.

Research doesn't hold all the answers to why the arts are important, but it does confirm what most people already know to be true in their hearts and minds: The arts make a significant contribution to helping all students achieve success in school, work, and life.

Excerpted, with permission, from Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement, by Sandra S. Ruppert (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and Arts Education Partnership, 2006), www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/critical-evidence.shtml.